

COUNTRY French Somaliland

DATE DISTR. 10 May 1948

SUBJECT Officials of French Somaliland

NO. OF PAGES 1

PLACE ACQUIRED [REDACTED] 25X1A

NO. OF ENCLS. (LISTED BELOW)

DATE OF INFO 25X1A

SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

- CONFIDENTIAL
1. The Governor of French Somaliland, P.H. Sirlex, is not a career man of the Colonial Service but is a political appointee who is a close adherent of General de Gaulle and is quite pro-British. During the war he was a war correspondent and traveled a great deal between Asmara and Aden. His appointment was possibly influenced by A. Besse, whose friendship he cultivated during the war.
  2. General Gentilhomme, representing the Compagnie Afrique Orientale, was in Addis Ababa during the month of March 1948, attempting to secure the monopoly for the supply of salt to Ethiopia which it held before and during the Italian occupation. He did not succeed in this and Besse & Company were named importing agents by the C.A.O., probably as a result of influence by Governor Sirlex. The C.A.O. is operating salt evaporation works at Massawa and is repairing the plant at Assab through a deal with the British Military Administration and possibly with Besse participation in some form.
  3. Michel Cote, President of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway, Director of the Compagnie Afrique Orientale, and interested in the Banque d'Indo-Chine, is at present in Addis Ababa. He is studying improvements proposed for the railroad and attempting to discourage the Ethiopian Government's desire for an independent port. The various companies Cote represents control almost all the commercial and transport activity in French Somaliland and have great weight in government affairs.
  4. The deputy elected to the French Chamber of Deputies from French Somaliland, Martine, is very definitely politically left but probably not communist, although he has been publicly called a Communist at meetings of the Chamber of Commerce by the previous deputy, who was a strong conservative. Martine is an employee of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway, which has a number of Communists among its staff.